FRAGONARD

with an introduction and notes

by

JAMES LAVER

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THE FABER GALLERY

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(1732–1806)

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FABER AND FABER

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The French Riviera, with its cities of pleasure and its bathing places, almost cheek-by-jowl along the whole length of the coast, presents today a very different aspect from its appearance in the eighteenth century. But, in the hills behind, the little town of Grasse, visited by a few tourists in swift automobiles, remains almost unchanged. It is a charming little place, with its steep and narrow streets, and the very air about it is impregnated with the scent of flowers.

It has, indeed, been a little opened up; its walls and ramparts confine it a little less tightly. In the eighteenth century it had more the aspect of a fortified town, not having yet lost the memory of the Algerian pirates who used not so long before to make a practice of raiding Provence, burning houses, destroying crops and carrying off the women captive. For they were beautiful women and fetched high prices in the slave markets of North Africa and the Levant. But it must always have been a pleasant enough place to live in, with its almost perpetual sunshine and the wind blowing from the mountain or the sea.

There on April 5, 1732, a son was born to François Fragonard, merchant, and his wife Françoise Petit. The family had long been settled in the place, and the researches of the genealogists have traced it back to a certain Gianpietro Fregonardo or Fregonardi, a Lombard from the little village of Fregona in the Milanese, who came to France at the end of the sixteenth century and settled there. This Italian ancestry, remote though it was, was not to be without influence on the subject of our study.

The child was named Jean Honoré. His father, although called a merchant in the register of baptism, left the running of the business—a glove shop—largely to his wife, as is often the case in France, and spent his time lounging about and dreaming of making a fortune by profitable investment of the small sum which had been saved from the profits of the shop. Life was easy, except perhaps for Madame Fragonard, and the boy spent his time, without any very close surveillance, roaming the countryside and playing with the children of his neighbours.

He must early have been conscious of the beauty of the landscape, of the crystalline air, of the golden light of the wide-arched sky, and above all, surely, of the odour of flowers; for Grasse was already profiting from the perfume-industry for which it is known today. Around the town myriads of flowers were cultivated as other places cultivated vegetables or corn. In particular were grown roses, the distillation of which commanded high prices all over Europe. Many critics have noted Fragonard's obsession with this flower. For him the lovely blossom seemed, throughout his life, to have a symbolic significance. It is at least interesting to note how often he depicted it in his paintings and how often their titles include the word 'rose'.

Jean Honoré's *vie de province*, or *de Provence*, came to an abrupt end when he was fifteen years old. His father had entrusted the family fortune to some compatriots of his who were trying to market, in Paris, a newly invented fire pump. But the affair went badly and he suddenly decided to transport his whole family to the capital to supervise it more closely. Alas! it was already too late. He was compelled to sell the little business at Grasse and to find employment in Paris. A place was found for the boy in the office of a notary.

It soon became evident, however, that the law would never be his *métier*. He spent his time running about the streets and making drawings of all the types he found there, all the more fascinating because he saw them with the fresh eye of the provincial. His master seems to have been an enlightened man, for he informed Jean Honoré's parents that the boy would never be happy except as an artist. What was to be done? The Fragonards were poor people knowing hardly anyone in Paris. Greatly daring, his mother took him to see Boucher, then at the height of his fame. But the painter *à la mode* would not accept him as a pupil. He sent him to Chardin, and that admirable painter of the poetry of humble life became, surprisingly enough, Fragonard's first master. But Chardin soon realized that the young man would never make a painter in his genre and after six months he sent him back to Boucher, who, impressed by his obvious talent, now accepted him.

There could have been no happier arrangement. Perhaps Boucher already realised that the young provincial was destined to continue his tradition, and even to impart to the mythological, slightly *grivois* world in which he moved, a larger and more personal significance. Certainly Boucher was very good to Fragonard. He was accepted as one of the family, adored Madame Boucher and was not at all indifferent to the succession of lovely models who passed through the studio of the Master, to be immortalized perhaps in one of the decorative panels of Madame de Pompadour's boudoir.

After a couple of years' apprenticeship, Fragonard had so completely assimilated Boucher's manner that, perhaps by a scruple of conscience, he recommended him to try for the Prix de Rome. Fragonard was not eligible, not having studied at the school of the *Académie*. But Boucher cried: "You are my pupil. That is enough",

Plate 1. *The Schoolmistress. 'Dites donc, s'il vous plaît.'* See page 24

and it proved to be even so. Fragonard was not only allowed to compete but was successful in gaining the prize. This, however, did not involve his immediate departure for Rome. Some years before it had been decided to defer this departure for all the candidates until they had a little more experience, and they were therefore placed in the *École des élèves protégés*, presided over by Carlo Van Loo. Fragonard entered the school and stayed there until 1756, when the time came for him to go to Rome. Before his departure he went to see his old master who said to him: "My dear Frago, you are going to see Michelangelo and Raphael, but I tell you, in friendly confidence, that if you take those people seriously, you are lost". The word he actually used was stronger, and less translatable!

When Fragonard arrived in Rome in December, 1756, he was twenty-four; and he took his place in the splendid school in the Palazzo Mancini presided over by the painter Natoire. To say that he was unhappy there would be absurd; he had the true ebullient Provençal temperament, and Rome enchanted him. But Boucher had seen more clearly than he did himself where his true talent lay. He was submissive and eager to learn but, somehow, he felt rather overwhelmed than inspired by the great masters of the past. Michelangelo and Raphael had, as Boucher had divined, nothing to teach him. His own preferences were for painters like Guido Reni, Guercino, Albani, Solimena, and Pietro da Cortona. Natoire, in his reports, showed himself not at all contented with the progress of the young man whom he

persisted in calling *le sieur Flagonard.*

Fragonard's release from the inhibitions imposed on him by Rome came when he began to realize that academic painting in the grand manner was not for him. But, before he left the Eternal City, he made two friends who were to prove of the utmost value to him in the development of his own talent. One was Hubert-Robert, like him a student at the Palazzo Mancini; the other was a gifted amateur and patron of artists, the Abbé de Saint Non. Together they escaped from Rome and explored the surrounding country, Tivoli, and the other great country houses of the nobility, with their grandiose façades, their formal gardens decorated with statues, altars and other relics of antiquity, their avenues of secular trees. Fragonard made innumerable drawings, including the sanguines of the Villa d'Este which are among the most cherished of his works. He himself felt intensely the magic of the semi-wild, semi-formal landscapes; indeed, it may be said that he went on painting the Villa d'Este trees for the rest of his life. The dose of italianism which came to him from his ancestry, the pleasure of the Provençal in rich verdure, blue skies and a light so intense that it presents itself to the eye as a kind of golden haze, all this combined to form in his mind, as it were, the eternal background, the inevitable, the fatal décor.

Fragonard returned to Paris in the autumn of 1761 and the first task before him was to submit to the *Académie* a set piece to prove that he had not wasted his time in Rome. It was necessary to choose some 'classical' subject and he hesitated for some time between scenes from Tasso and the Sacrifice of Iphigenia. Finally he decided (a characteristic touch) to borrow a scene from an opera by Destouches entitled *Callirhoë.* The subject was classical or pseudo-classical; the treatment already bore witness to the originality of the artist. It was, nonetheless, received with great applause and there seemed no reason why Fragonard should not continue on this academic high road. But, although his picture might be admired by the critics and even accepted by the State as suitable for reproduction in tapestry, it brought no immediate profit to the artist.

Meanwhile other offers were made to him. Beside the official world of the *Académie*, with its emphasis on 'noble' subjects painted in imitation of the great masters, there existed another public, the public of rich financiers, *fermiers-généraux* and the like, and the actresses and *danseuses* for whom they were busy building charming little houses in Paris and in the neighbouring countryside. Such people had no use for the grand manner; what they wanted was good painting—for many of them had excellent taste—applied to subjects which provided both an æsthetic and an erotic pleasure.

Diderot, and other serious critics, lamented that a man of Fragonard's talent had been diverted from the 'grand manner' to the production of works for the decoration of the boudoir and the alcove. Posterity has been unable to agree with them. When Fragonard was diverted—if diverted is the word—from the high road of 'serious' painting into the charming byways which he was to frequent for the rest of his life, the world lost another imitator of the great masters and gained the most exquisite of the *petits-maîtres*, the man who was after all much more than a *petit-maître*, who was to transport the frivolous subject into another dimension altogether.

Fragonard's first success in a genre which conformed so perfectly to his own temperament and his own talent was the famous *Hasards heureux de l'escarpolette* (Plate 4). This painting was a *succès fou* from the moment of its appearance, and from that moment Fragonard never lacked commissions. There is no reason to suppose that he ever regretted for a moment the abandonment of the 'grand manner'. He knew himself to be sufficiently fine a draughtsman, sufficiently subtle a colourist, to be 'great in little subjects'. He was able to rise above both his genre and his epoch and to produce works which for their sheer technical mastery have never been surpassed. As the Goncourts[1], writing of his nudes, remark: "Sometimes in his treatment of the female body, Fragonard reminds us of Rubens, a Rubens seen, as it were, through the brilliant handling of Boucher: then it is no longer a question of languid sleepy-heads sunk in the white bedclothes and in the last stages of sleep; it is no longer a question of white Venuses who seem to have emerged at one and the same time from the foam of the sea and from whipped white-of-egg . . . . it is a question of living bodies, full-blooded, touched with sun; bodies where the brush lays down, without blending them, separate touches of vermilion, Prussian blue, and chrome yellow to express the light and shade and the reflected light of an arm; bodies of which the elbow is indicated by a touch of vermilion swimming in a reflection of yellow gold . . . . This is the miracle of Fragonard". Indeed in some of his technical methods he already anticipated the painting of a hundred years later. There are times when he seems to look at nature with the eye of an impressionist.

Gay by nature and avid of pleasure, he soon found himself swept up into that world of the *petit hôtel* and the *coulisses* which to us, in retrospect, seems the very essence of one aspect of the eighteenth century. Known affectionately as '*Le petit Frago*' he was the welcome guest at the supper parties of a world which, although frivolous and extravagant, had, at least, better taste than any similar society that has existed since. This 'enchanted island in the sea of time' still excites the

[1] Edmond and Jules de Goncourt. *L'Art du Dix-huitième Siècle.* 2 vols., 3rd ed., Paris 1880–2.

imagination, and it is part of Fragonard's greatness that we see it largely through his eyes.

Like his master Boucher, whose place he had now taken, he was able to combine the life of pleasure with an absolute fury for work. He was launched not only in the field of easel-painting but in that more difficult task of interior decoration as it was understood in the eighteenth century. Among other commissions came one from no less a person than Madame Dubarry herself. She had recently been presented with the château at Louveciennes, and Fragonard was asked to decorate the special pavilion which was destined for the supper-parties of the King. The subject chosen was *Le Progrès de l'amour dans le coeur des jeunes filles.* For some reason his work never found its place in the pavilion. Fragonard's panels were returned to him and remained in his studio for twenty years. He carried them with him when he returned to Grasse.

Some critics have seen in them something more than the mere response of an artist to the subject suggested to him by a patron. Did they perchance represent the history of his own heart, in particular, his relations with Madeleine Guimard, the most celebrated dancer of her day? Certainly such relations occupied a large part of his thoughts at this period of his life.

He had been commissioned by her to decorate the salon of the *hôtel* in the *Chaussée d'Antin*, the so-called Temple of Terpsichore, in which she held supper parties famous alike for delicacy of fare and freedom of manners. Before the work was finished she quarrelled with him, but whether it was a quarrel between lovers or a mere dispute between patron and artist is a matter of conjecture. In any case, another artist was required to complete the task and Fragonard raised no objection to the employment of David, then a young man at the very beginning of his career. On 'la Guimard' it is related that Fragonard took a subtle revenge. Slipping into the house when no one was there, he found the decorations, including her portrait, finished. With a few skilful touches he transformed the smiling visage into the picture of a fury. A few moments later, the *danseuse* herself arrived, with a few friends, to inspect the work. Seeing her transformed image she exploded with rage. But, as a contemporary remarks, the more she raged, the more closely she resembled the portrait. And the story, of course, was soon all over Paris. Fragonard's fame was only increased by this episode.

Nonetheless, as Camille Mauclair happily expressed it: "Fragonard began to weary of the life of Frago". He began to think of settling down. And it so happened that the family Gérard, neighbours of his own relations at Grasse, proposed that he should take into his studio their eldest daughter Marie-Anne, who had already shown some talent as a miniature painter. At the age of seventeen she had come to Paris to work in the shop of a *parfumeur* named Isnard (who was probably also a connection). She became the pupil of Fragonard and shortly afterwards his wife. They were married on June 17, 1769.

Henceforward, there can be noted a modification in the work of Fragonard, a new warmth of sentiment, a feeling (almost in the manner of Chardin) for the beauty of the simple domestic things of life, in particular a delight in the innocence and *gaucherie* of children—for the couple were not long in having children of their own: the adorable Rosalie, who died tragically young, and Evariste, who became a painter, and, for a very short time, eclipsed his father's fame. Some of Fragonard's most charming paintings were produced at this period of his life.

He remained Frago, yet even when he continued to paint erotic subjects he transported them when he could into the open air, exchanging the boudoir for the harvest field, or the corner of the wood. And there is nothing artificial about his peasants. They are by no means the beribboned shepherds and shepherdesses who posture for us still in porcelain, exquisite figurines of Sèvres. They are real country people seen with a complete absence of sentimentality, charming as they are. There is something almost Dutch in the realism of his treatment, and critics now believe that he actually paid a visit to Holland to study the masters he admired so much.

In 1773 he visited Italy for the second time, no longer as a poor and unknown student, but as a master in his own right. The journey was made with his wife and in the company of a rich patron named Bergeret, who has left for the instruction—and the amusement—of posterity, his own *Journal de Voyage.* Bergeret was a somewhat pompous *nouveau riche* and he quarrelled with Fragonard before the long journey was done, but it was nonetheless an inspiration to the artist to revisit the scenes which had meant so much to him when he had seen them first in the company of Hubert-Robert and Saint Non. He returned to Paris refreshed.

Fragonard had long occupied, like so many artists of his time, a comfortable studio in the Louvre. There, surrounded by fine furniture, exquisite porcelain, pictures and tapestries—for he was now rich as well as famous—he lived with his wife, his two children, and his wife's sister Marguérite Gérard, his pupil. She was herself a painter of some talent besides being both younger and prettier than his wife. Fragonard and she spent much time together and exchanged letters in which some have detected a warmth which perhaps reveals something more than the warmth of friendship. Be that as it may, Fragonard was a happy man, surrounded by friends, universally admired, his pictures keenly sought after. And then, suddenly, out of a clear sky came the first rumblings of the storm which was to sweep everything away.

[*continued on page 24*

Plate 2

THE COQUETTE

(La petite coquette)

Paris: M. Arthur Veil-Picard Collection

12½ in. by 9½ in.

It is impossible to study the work of Fragonard without continually running across the name Walferdin. The painting reproduced here once formed part of his collection, and yet from what we know of his life and opinions it might have been thought unlikely that he would ever have interested himself in the painter of Grasse. Hippolyte Walferdin was a fellow-townsman of Diderot, both being natives of Langres, although, of course, they belonged to different generations, Walferdin having been born in 1795. He professed a veritable cult for the famous encyclopædist, and it is possible that his interest in Fragonard was first excited by reading Diderot's criticisms of the painter. Some such theory is necessary to explain the devotion of so ardent a republican as Walferdin for a painter so completely impregnated with the savour of the *ancien régime*. In any case he began to collect Fragonards, both paintings and drawings, and he was able to do this in spite of his comparative modest means, because at that time Fragonard was so completely out of fashion. However, his work began to return to favour in the middle of the century and about the year 1862, Walferdin, now an old man, agreed to cede the whole of his collection at his death to a rich *amateur*, in return for a pension. He did not die until 1880 when his treasures were dispersed.

In *The Little Coquette* we see the painter echoing (as in Plate 9) the style of Franz Hals. The hair is dressed in the fashion of Fragonard's own day, but the costume worn by the sitter is an eighteenth century version of the dress of the mid-seventeenth. To the modern eye this is hardly noticeable. What we see is the outstanding virtuousity of the handling, the freshness of the painting of the ruff, the delicate flesh tints, the beautiful gradations of the light and shade, and the brilliance of what might be called the characterization. The sitter seems to be pretending to be asleep, but under the half-closed lids the eyes are eloquent of invitation and the rose-bud lips full of mischief. The picture is, as it were, a close-up of one of the slender figures who play hide and seek through the shrubbery of his dream world. So must the heroine of the *Escarpolette* have looked when she was seating herself in her swing.

Plate 3

GARDENS OF THE VILLA D'ESTE

(Le petit parc)

London: Wallace Collection

14 in. by 17¾ in.

Fragonard's feeling for landscape was part of his nature; in his early childhood he had learned to love the woods and hills around Grasse. As a student at the Palazzo Mancini in Rome he must often have escaped from the narrow streets—for Rome wore a much more medieval aspect in the middle of the eighteenth century than it does today—to wander in the Borghese Gardens, and in those of the Villa Mattei and the Villa Negroni, the Villa Medici, the Villa Madama. He made drawings of them in sepia, bistre and sanguine, often in the company of Hubert-Robert, whose taste in such matters was so similar to his own.

In the summer of 1760 his friend the Abbé de Saint Non obtained from the Duke of Modena permission to spend two or three months at the Villa d'Este at Tivoli, and he took Fragonard with him. With their frequent visitor Hubert-Robert they wandered through the splendid alleys of overarching trees, admired the little cascades of the Temple of the Sibyl, paused to sketch the remnants of antiquity, statues, sarcophagi and altars so cunningly disposed in the grounds.

It is impossible to over-estimate the importance of this summer holiday on Fragonard's art. His pencil, or crayon, was never idle, and at the end of his stay his portfolio was stuffed with drawings. "Our young artist", reported Natoire more favourably than usual, "has made some beautiful studies which cannot but be very useful to him and redound to his honour. He has a very pronounced taste for this kind of landscape, into which he introduces very successful scenes of rural life". Natoire did not exaggerate. It might almost be said that Fragonard continued to paint the gardens of the Villa d'Este, its avenues and open spaces, for the rest of his life. He did so even when the picture is labelled with the name of a French location: as in the big, golden *Fête de St. Cloud* which hangs normally in the dining room of the Banque de France, and was seen in the Royal Academy, London, during the exhibition of 'European Masters of the Eighteenth Century', in the winter of 1954-5.

Plate 4

THE SWING

(Les hazards heureux de l'escarpolette)

London: Wallace Collection

31⅞ in. by 25⅝ in.

This delightful picture is probably the most famous of all Fragonard's compositions. Several replicas and smaller versions exist and an engraving of it was made by Nicolas Delaunay. The manner of its inception is known to us from the contemporary *Journal et Mémoires* of Colle, invaluable for the light they throw upon the relationship of artist and patron at this period. The rich Baron de St. Julien sent for the painter Doyen, and the latter duly presented himself to the Baron and his mistress in the little house which he had built for her. He proposed that Doyen should paint a picture of the lady on a swing, set in motion by a bishop, and that he (the Baron) should be in such a position that the disorder in the lady's dress due to her swift motion through the air should lose none of its advantages. Doyen, who was a painter of religious subjects, was a little scandalized by this proposal, but he kept his head sufficiently to suggest a slight improvement: that one of the lady's shoes should be flying through the air and should be caught by cupids. Nonetheless, he declined the commission for himself and suggested Fragonard.

Even Fragonard declined to bring a bishop into the business, but he painted the picture with such grace and delicacy, in view of the somewhat *risqué* nature of the subject, that the Baron, the lady and the general public were all equally enchanted. It was indeed the foundation of his vogue, for every rich financier with a pretty mistress was now anxious to employ him for the decoration of alcove or boudoir. The picture is a real *tour de force* of handling both in colour and composition. The girl, for she is little more, seems to fly through the air like a pink and white butterfly. The foliage of the trees, although not without a hint of the theatrical, is most delicately painted. Indeed the picture as a whole is much more 'finished' than Fragonard's later compositions. It was painted in the late 1760's, remained for some years in the possession of the Baron de St. Julien, passed to the Duc de Morny and was purchased by Lord Hertford at his sale in 1865.

Plate 5

THE FOUNTAIN OF LOVE

(La fontaine d'amour)

London: Wallace Collection

24 in. by 20 in.

At first sight, this picture hardly seems to belong to the *œuvre* of Fragonard; it appears rather to anticipate the work of Prud'hon, a generation later. The pinks and blues of his habitual palette have given place to sombre greys and browns. Mr. Trenchard Cox[1] remarks, rather unkindly, that it "shows some after-effects of the disease of grandiosity" only otherwise to be seen in the set pieces which Fragonard painted, at the beginning of his career, to satisfy the Academicians, before he wisely abandoned the 'grand manner' to follow the true bent of his genius.

Yet *The Fountain of Love* is very far from being a frigid essay in the classico-romantic. Indeed, in spite of its darkness of tone, it is not frigid at all. It vibrates with passion, and passion of a more serious kind than Fragonard usually cared to portray. Georges Grappe[2] sees in it the visible sign of a deepening in the quality of his own emotions. "The frivolous lover", he says, "whose pleasure was limited to running from liaison to liaison, who thought of love as a game . . . suddenly feels himself a different man. The tone of his art changes; the song on his lips dies away". And he connects this change in Fragonard's character, and in his choice of subjects at this time, with his relations with the famous dancer Madeleine Guimard, whom he first encountered in 1767.

Be that as it may, the French critic is surely justified in saying: "It is no longer Anacreon, or even Horace. With a single bound, Fragonard rejoins the great poets of Antiquity who envisaged Love as a mysterious and fatal Deity, as the supreme good and the most terrible of evils, as the tunic of Nessus impregnating our flesh to the marrow of the bones with a love-philtre at once magical and mortal".

The two lovers, out of breath and almost dying with desire, reach together the eternal fountain at which they hope to slake their thirst. Certainly Fragonard has succeeded in depicting the irresistible impulse which carries them onward, an impulse transcending the passion of the individual, and involving Humanity itself.

[1] In his *General Guide to the Wallace Collection*, 1933.

[2] In his *La Vie et l'Œuvre de J. H. Fragonard*, 1929.

Plate 6

THE SOUVENIR

(Le chiffre d'amour)

London: Wallace Collection

9⅝ in. by 7⅜ in.

The Souvenir belongs to the same period of Fragonard's life as *The Fountain of Love*, and if the latter represents a deepening of the emotional nature, so must the former. But in *The Souvenir* there is no hint of the 'grand manner', no striving after cosmic grandiloquence. There is pathos but hardly tragedy in this charming painting. Here are no classical chitons, no cupids even, but a tree in a park on which a girl, clad in the contemporary mode, carves the initials of her beloved. She has already cut an S, but the significance of this, if it ever had one, has been lost.

The small size of the painting nearly always surprises those who have only seen it in reproduction. Yet there is nothing small or niggling in the handling. The beautifully balanced design gives an astonishing feeling of space, the masses being arranged on the old and tried principle of the 'golden section'. The delicate silhouette of the girl is most exquisitely managed, and the artist has not forgotten to emphasize the slimness of the waist and the elegant abandon of the posture.

Equally happy is the colour harmony and the whole balance of the composition. It is only necessary to block out the pet dog on the bench to the right to see what an important part he plays in the structure of the picture; his colour also, and that of the scarf thrown down with such seeming carelessness, serves to relieve the darkness of the right half of the canvas; he forms, so to speak, the opposite and the complement of the dark silhouetted head.

There is a delicacy of sentiment in the picture which just stops short at the precipice edge of sentimentality. It does not topple over, as do so many of the paintings, more or less consciously inspired by this one, which have depicted similar subjects since. Nicolas Delaunay made an engraving from it which became very popular in Fragonard's own lifetime. The painting itself was in the collection of the Duc de Morny. It was bought at his sale in Paris in 1865 by Lord Hertford.

Plate 7

THE MUSIC LESSON

(La leçon de musique)

Paris: Louvre

44 in. by 48 in.

This painting may be compared with *Study: The Reader* (Plate 9), as it also shows the influence of the Dutch masters on the work of Fragonard. That he was ever actually in Holland has been denied by some critics, but the matter would seem to have been settled by his drawings after Rembrandt's *Night Watch* and Van der Helst's *Banquet of the Town Guard* mentioned in a sale of 1778. It seems unlikely that these drawings could have been made elsewhere than at Amsterdam. But whether Fragonard was ever actually in Holland or not, he shows quite clearly, in his work, his admiration for such painters as Wijnants, Pieter de Hooghe, Van der Meer, Hobbema, and Ruysdael.

The Music Lesson is a deliberate echo of half-a-dozen 'Music Lessons' of the seventeenth century Dutch school. In fact, Fragonard admits as much by clothing his characters in what he imagined to be 'period' costume. It is always easier to put the man than the woman into such costumes. Here the male figure shows clearly by his ruff to what period he is supposed to belong; but neither the hat nor the somewhat indeterminate garment he wears really suggest the seventeenth century. His whole costume has rather the suggestion of the *bal masqué* or fancy dress ball. With the girl's costume Fragonard hardly pretends to be in period at all; she is simply wearing the dress of his own day.

The handling in this rapid sketch is, of course, much looser than that of the Dutch style, and the tonality, although plainly based upon Dutch models, is in higher key. In fact, Fragonard, even when painting what he probably looked upon as a pastiche, could never be anything but himself.

The picture, formerly in the Walferdin Collection, was presented to the Louvre in 1849.

Plate 8

TRAINING IS EVERYTHING

(L'Éducation fait tout)

San Paolo: Museum of Art

22 in. by 26 in.

This engaging genre piece belongs to the same period of the artist's career as *The Schoolmistress* (Plate 1), that is to say shortly after his marriage to Marie-Anne Gérard. He now had a country retreat at Vaugirard, which in the eighteenth century had not yet been swallowed up by Paris, and he began to taste the joys of family and rural life. "Fragonard", says Camille Mauclair[1], "became almost a Dutch master. His qualities of precision, of lightness of hand, of Impressionism, for we must already use the word in this connection, found an unexpected field for their application. For the second time in his life, the contact with nature was of service to him. At the Villa d'Este it had helped him to avoid the danger of academicism; in Paris it preserved him from the excessive mannerism to which his alarming facility and the encouragement of the public might have led him. This precious, luxurious and complex artist revealed himself as the painter of artlessness. For background, his little house and garden; for models, his family, and he needed no more. From time to time he still produced little pictures in his earlier manner . . . but such works became rarer among those produced by Frago. His gracious genius was entirely subjugated by the charming *gaucherie* of childhood, and now began an exquisite series in which composition, colour, attitudes and technique touched perfection; as for example *L'Éducation fait tout*, in which the children are teaching the dogs of the household how to behave".

There is a drawing in existence which varies in small details from the painting. The painting was engraved by Delaunay, as a pendant to *The Little Preacher*, and attained wide popularity, for the eighteenth century, following Rousseau, was beginning to develop a real cult of the child.

[1] In his *Fragonard, Biographie critique.* [1904].

Plate 9

STUDY: THE READER

(L'Étude)

Paris: Louvre

32 in. by 24 in.

In 1769 Fragonard painted a series of four decorative figure pieces, all it would seem within a few weeks (or even a few days) of one another. The first of the series, *La Musique*, bears on the back an inscription in a contemporary hand: "*Portrait de M. de la Bretèche, peint par Fragonard, en* 1769, *en une heure de temps*". The fourth bears the note: "*Portrait de M. l'Abbé de Saint Non, peint par Fragonard, en* 1769, *en une heure de temps*". This is even more interesting in view of Fragonard's close friendship with Saint Non ever since his student days in Italy. The third painting, *L'Inspiration*, bears no inscription, but is thought to represent Diderot, who, in spite of his sometimes severe criticisms, was a firm friend of the painter. No sitter's name has been suggested for the second of the series, *L'Étude*, the picture here reproduced, and there is no claim that it was painted in an hour. It is reasonable to suppose, however, that it did not take very much longer.

All four canvases bear convincing witness to the sureness of Fragonard's hand and the rapidity of his execution. They are sketches, but sketches of genius, with something of the bravura handling of Franz Hals, for whom Fragonard, as mentioned, had a great admiration. Even the costumes are those of the great Dutch master, or rather as close an approximation to them as the eighteenth century could manage. Diderot himself is given a falling lace collar *à la Vandyck*, and the young girl in our painting wears the so-called Medici collar of a slightly earlier period. Fragonard was convinced that he was painting all the sitters in this series in 'historical' costume, but to the modern eye the *dix-huitième siècle* shows through. In any case, the female sitter, as always, gives the game away by her style of hairdressing, which is simply the mode of Fragonard's own day.

The four pictures formed part of the La Caze collection left to the Louvre exactly a hundred years after they were painted.

Plate 10

PORTRAIT OF A BOY AS PIERROT

(L'enfant blond)

London: Wallace Collection

23½ in. by 19½ in.

"The true Fragonard", says Mr. Trenchard Cox[1], "is seen in the *Boy as Pierrot*, the first glance at which recalls us to youth and spring. The dress is decidedly Watteauesque, with its pierrot design and long, dangling sleeves, but the straw hat is curiously modern, like many that one might see on a summer's morning in the *Bois*. The secret of the picture's charm is its freshness of colour; and it was surely its scheme of pink, white and blue that prompted Mr. D. S. MacColl, a former keeper of the Collection, once so aptly to describe it as 'resembling a bunch of sweet-peas'—freshly gathered with the silvery dew still upon them".

When the picture was sold as an item in the Cope Collection in 1872, it was listed as a Boucher. But Boucher, for all his genius, could never have given to the world this exquisite image of childhood. Fragonard, at least after his marriage had revealed to him the tenderness of his own heart, adored children, and loved to romp with them. Certainly no one has ever painted them with more complete understanding.

The Goncourts[2] (speaking, it is true, of his miniatures of children, but their remarks are equally true of the canvas before us), say that Fragonard "knew how to render the light in children's eyes. He painted the soft and delicate indecision of their chubby contours . . ., the fine porcelain of their foreheads, the blue veins of their temples, the pout or the smile opening or closing the red blossom of the mouth . . . Are they not pretty, these well-brushed children, with their locks of hair, so fine, so blond, almost the colour of daylight, with their billowing collarettes, the hat and jacket of Pierrot, which make them stand out from their frames with the air of carnival angels coming home from a children's fancy dress ball".

Our little boy seems to have brought a bunch of roses back from the party to give to his *maman*.

[1] In his *General Guide to the Wallace Collection*, 1933.

[2] In their *L'Art du Dix-huitième Siècle*, 1880-2.

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He was just fifty-seven at the time of the storming of the Bastille. Like so many other artists of the time he welcomed the Revolution as the dawn of a new era of liberty and universal benevolence. Like them he did not foresee the excesses which were so shortly to follow, nor the disastrous effect it would have on his own fortunes. Nearly all his patrons, the rich financiers who had so eagerly disputed his pictures, were ruined; many of them perished by the guillotine. Some of his artist friends were imprisoned and he himself was in danger, or would have been but for the intervention of David, who under the revolutionary regime had become a veritable dictator of the arts. David is not a very likeable character, but at least he remembered the man who had helped him to a commission at the very beginning of his career, and now he not only saved Fragonard from persecution but persuaded the Convention to appoint him a member of the National Museum Committee which was engaged in salvaging and arranging the works of art confiscated from private collections.

Fragonard was saved, and his habitual good temper did not desert him. Yet the remaining years of his life must have been sad enough: his train of life reduced to something little better than penury, his friends dead or in exile, worst of all the complete contempt into which his own work as a painter had suddenly fallen. For to the elegant frivolity of the *ancien régime* had now succeeded the bleak austerity of Republican virtue. Pompous, pseudo-Roman heroics were now all the mode, and Fragonard could not succeed in conforming to the new fashion. His son Evariste conformed without any difficulty and his father's warm heart applauded his success. When Jean Honoré Fragonard died on August 22, 1806, there were few contemporary critics who would not have agreed that Evariste was a greater painter than his father had ever been. Posterity has not confirmed their opinion. Indeed, today, Evariste Fragonard is completely forgotten and his father has long been recognized as one of the glories of French art. Trivial, and sometimes even scandalous, as his subject matter may have been, the sweep of his design, the subtle gradations of his light and shade, the harmony of his colour, the delicacy of his sentiment, the essential truth of his vision of the world—all these place him, if not among the greatest masters of all, at least in a noble company of true artists who have enriched posterity by offering, as it were, an exquisite distillation of the spirit of their time.

Note on Plate 1

THE SCHOOLMISTRESS

(Dites donc, s'il vous plaît)

London: Wallace Collection

10½ in. by 14 in.

The young schoolmistress of a village school is about to cut slices from a huge peasant loaf for her pupils. One child is being admonished because he expects his share without saying "Please". "Under her reproaches", says Pierre de Nolhac[1], "he is confused, deliciously gauche. Some sort of shirt half covers his white body, so chubby that it is nothing but dimples. His feet are placed one over the other, and seem to be as much ashamed of themselves as the little round head, bowed on the breast, drawn entirely in outline, with the nose uptilted and the mouth open".

The picture is a good example of the new feeling for children and for the simple domestic life which Fragonard developed soon after his marriage to Marie-Anne Gérard in 1769. It was a charming touch to sign his name on the blackboard, 'ABCDEFragonard', as if it were part of the lesson. There exist a design and a sketch for, and a replica of, this picture. The original was bought by Lord Hertford in Paris in 1841.

[1] In his *Fragonard*, 1918.

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